

The Spoon

Well flip a coin then!" She flung her hands up at his usual caution.

Huh! That's the way you'd do it! But it's a very important Pbusiness@ decision, M'am. A subject you flunk most grievously." He shut the drapes against the light off the blue water, his back to her. Now as he turned around, she snickered at the drapes, an assortment of sunflowers and dragons. "No," she insisted from the sofa, hugging her knees when he began fiddling with the television console, "I would just, simply, decide."

His tuning grew agitated. "I have seen you decide! Just grab anything out of the chaos!"

"Nonsense!" she shouted with fiery conviction at his multicolored profile, the wild television picture splashing around the small, darkened apartment.

"Oh it's been that way sometimes," she abruptly mused. "But at least I don't wait on pins and needles for yet another phonecall."

"Oh yeah? Well just thinking of you making some half-witted guess gives me apoplexy." He was bent over and talking into the TV, where electronic confetti jumped around the screen. "You just leap at things!"

He suddenly chuckled in amazement at her, and at the picture which mysteriously snapped in on the huge screen. Squinting, he revolved towards her, basketball players flying behind him.

"You are fifty-five years old!" she informed him, and he rose up in order to stand as straight as possible.

"Does that mean I have no future?" His voice had a pleading tone.

"It keeps getting narrower." She squeezed her knees harder and her whole body seemed to get smaller on the sofa. "So why flub around when time is so precious?"

He approached in mock fear and flopped beside her, his cream-colored slacks and turtleneck softly immaculate next to her jeans and sweatshirt. "Why are you here?" he asked.

"In the short run I was invited to watch the Boston Celtics on your ridiculous TV. In the long run..." she trailed off.

"It's starting to sound serious," he quipped, intently watching the screen.

But she continued with her original thought. "I wouldn't even know if Harry Bird was playing with a square basketball."

LAR-ry Bird," he exhaled, as if that small mistake could ruin the game--though the last few moments consisted of players speeding to and fro incessantly, and with no points scored.

"Turn it off and let's go out you damn cheapskate! It's the middle of the day. I'm sorry," she told his astonished face, "but I just can't stare at it like you do, comatose. And what's left?

Those horrible drapes that you must have gotten on sale like everything else in this suffocating apartment and life."

He pressed forward beside her--she thought in reaction to her comment--but someone had almost scored, the ball spinning round and round the hoop before falling into the midst of anxious giants. Even in the muted sound level of the television their grunts and squeaky sneakers were audible. "What, uh, what about the long run?" he inquired absently.

"Well now what about it?" she slapped her knees in exaggerated heartiness.

"They missed again! Oh well. You, you started to say that in the long.... How can you forget things a few seconds past, and yet remember some tiny alleged hurt ten years ago? Is that female or something?"

She waved off his comments and looked to him with a face so kind he trembled. "In the long run I'm here to bury you."

His eyes widened and he fell so far back into the cushions that she had to twist round to see his face at all. "The few friends and relatives you had you've absolutely alienated. I'm the only one," she sighed.

"Alienated! For God's sakes," he whispered, "we..."--he brushed invisible lint off his immaculate sweater--"s-speak--if it's absolutely necessary."

"They will all flee! Flee when you finally keel over!"

"Alienated is a strong word," he kept pouting, buried even more in the cushions.

"They're all strong words if you think about them."

Her "insights" always annoyed him, who thought that no generalization could be applied to life with the least degree of certainty, although something at least proved valuable if it made money. "Listen Miss Smart-Ass, I've just been checked by Dr Sam.

He took a hundred tests and checked my orifices and..."

"Your precious orifices will last no longer than anybody else's."

"Everything excellent!" he proclaimed while following the parabolic three-point shot of Larry, not Harry, Bird.

She bounded up from the sofa to shut off the console.

"Just when the action is..." he began protesting.

As the picture slowly died behind her she spun round.

"Doc gave me the results before you got them--at the bar of the sailing club."

"How wonderful! One's intimate details discussed over light beer." He was fingering inside his turtleneck.

"You know Dr. Sam for goodness..."

"Yeah I do . He goes from office to hospital to sailing club. Does he even have an apartment? I know he's never been on a boat of any type in his life, let alone sailing..." and he fluttered his hand as if it were an agitated sail.

She shrugged. "So he tells everybody everything. So what? People and their supposed secrets! What a joke!" She was pulling the drapes open now, and startling light flooded past her small and somewhat ragged figure.

"Anything else I should know?" he inquired from the sofa.

"Yes. A testicle didn't descend or something?"

"I was a little kid!" he sputtered, closing his eyes against the

light and against his so-remote past.

"Yeah? Well they're to keep an eye out for something now...men of your age? I think he said something like that anyway--if I didn't read it somewhere."

"What? Look out for? Big C?" he squirmed.

"So say it" she hissed. "Cancer. Say it. Say things."

He didn't say it. "Oh my God!" he said, thrusting back into the cushions as if shot.

"Anyway, not that definite. Besides, that or something has always got to get you in the end--or in the crotch even. Oh now don't put on your prude face. You weren't always so prudish I recall."

Almost dancing in the brilliant light, she formed his too-familiar words with her mouth as he was saying them. "Never mind all that!" He looked up and caught her: "Now please knock off the clowning and tell me what Dr. Sam said exactly."

"What I told you. Exactly. Vaguely. Whatever. Phone him. Ask him yourself. It's not a confession of weakness to do that. "Something to look out for." I think he said. That's all. An afterthought! You're making too much of it--at least I think you are."

"Close the drapes! I can't even see you. You look like some low-budget Hollywood version of a saintly vision. It hurts my eyes. And I fervently hope that's not a symptom of something."

She made a large, sweeping gesture to include the brilliant blue water and a few white sails just then entering the bay. "That's home. Out there. Where we came from, where we're going."

"God I can't talk to you for ten minutes without the morbid drama coming out." He shoved forward on the sofa as if to mock her intensity.

"How could the truth be morbid?" she snapped. "Truth isn't anything but itself."

"Another of your INsights?" He shifted uncomfortably. "And how about putting my beloved Celtics back on? I really have no money to go out. Do you?" He was raising himself just enough to turn a pocket inside out.

"Aw come on! You must have a dollar or two left over from your trip," she laughed. "Come on! We'll get on your beautiful sportcoat--the only thing to my knowledge you didn't buy on sale." She raced to the bedroom and came out with the coat. "Hah hah! I thought so!" and she plucked out a wallet of travelers checks from an inside pocket while waifishly dancing though pools of light on the parquet floor.

"What makes you think they're mine? I have to turn them in to the accountants."

"Who owns the company?" She stopped dancing to point at him.

"I shall tell you exactly what to tell the accountants. You needn't improvise. And I will take charge of these." She had fingered inside the slim wallet, having already peeked at the denomination during her dance: five one hundreds she deduced.

"How much is there?"

"A couple of hundred or fifty. Don't worry about it. Since your funeral will cost you nothing, we'll take out a little at this end."

"Funeral? Funeral? Please stop before you spin yet another fantasy!"

She didn't of course. "You'll be alone at one of your selfish little lunches at Angela's or The Pirate and then FOOP! your face ends up in the crab casserole! You'll die sitting, as now, as practically always."

"Foop indeed! Why do your fantasies always extract my dignity? And not just your fantasies either."

"They'll call me up. They know me. And I'll tell them Poh it's only a spell. He's had them a dozen times.@"

"I've had no spells. Ever! Zero."

"Get you across the street. I'm little but wiry," she remarked to his incredulous face. "And as to spells I'm talking future tense, five years from now--or beginning tomorrow maybe. Who knows such things?"

"And then...up to this apartment?"--his question indicating that it was a perfectly good place to live but obviously not to be dead in.

She tried to drag him off the sofa by way of a dress rehearsal. The effort, futile, left her winded. "No, uh, not up here you absolute lump! Right to...water. Leave you there a minute. "Now don't go away, y'hear?" Up here to fetch hideous drapes, then go get my sailboat. I know the winds and tides."

"Then that's all you know!" He was still holding to the arm of the sofa.

"I'll get you to a spot where you'll travel out to sea for sure."

"That's enough," he begged, his eyes shut.

"And then," she nodded, her own eyes closed, "a few personal words...before releasing dead-you and horror-drapes to God and the wide sea-world and eternity!"

"No good. Lousy plan. No foreshight as usual. They'll think you murdered me. The authorities will."

"I'll worry about that then."

"Oh that's you all right!" he pronounced.

"So come on! Let's motor! Have some fun. You need a..." and she managed to shove and punch him off the sofa and onto the parquet floor..."push!"

There he sat as she draped the coat over his shoulders, resigned to the punishment she had, and would, inflict, and enjoying the game of it too in his ironic way. "It all sounds expensive," he shrugged.

"Leave that to me. I'll forge."

And of course he protested all the way from the boutique (where she charged a simple daytime dress and sensible heels and they stored her jeans and ragged sweat shirt in a grocery bag) to the waiting limo she had arranged that morning, and especially at the Grand Cafe where she ordered lest he see the menu.

And onto the pubcrawl all of the bright afternoon.

She lost track of the spending but smiled in the darkening limo coming

back while feeling the irregular ridge, indicating that all the traveler's checks had been ripped out. As they both looked straight ahead she found herself talking quietly and slowly.

"We live such deprived lives, you and I. We know all there is to know about each other and that's wonderful, as well as deadly at times...but a letting-go like this every few months or so...hey I need it too! I might go around most of the time looking like Tugboat Annie but..."

He waited for her to finish the thought but she just stared at the blue flow of the early evening traffic.

"I bore you, I know," he whispered. "I bore myself. But I could..." The plush upholstery all but swallowed his quiet words.

She took his hand. "Oh it's too late for any changing or promises. I love you period. When you bore me or when, like today and though kicking and dragging, you help make life a little more exciting."

"Before I die, yes?" The violet light deepened the wrinkles in his face, the tweed of his sportcoat.

He figured his question had been humorous but she nodded severely. "That's right. Loosen you and your wallet up before it's too late."

"Well I never thought I'd say it, but I had one hell of a good time! That one waiter was so snobby he didn't even want to take the whole tip!" he giggled. Wanted to save us from being branded Pnoveau riches @or something I guess. He pondered the red light they had stopped at.

The limo ticked away, young people in shorts crossing in one chaotic wave. "But that's what I am all right," he continued.

"Hey! Old rich, new rich, or poor. He got his tip. That was his only business with you. Take things a moment at a time."

"Square basketball!" he laughed softly. "I could never come up with anything like that. Too batty and too imaginative."

"You're happy."

It was still somewhat light over the bay when they returned. They sat separately as they often did, this time to watch a windsurfer outlined in weak fire against the dark. He disappeared for a few seconds out in the chill vastness of water...and then his sail emerged much further out, looking almost like an inverted teaspoon, its bowl holding all that remained of the light.

After a last glimmer, that too was folded into blackness, and they couldn't hear the other's breathing in the small apartment, or, some moments later, the soft weeping.

